

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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## CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR THE WOUNDFIN, A WESTERN FISH

Parts of the Virgin River system in Nevada, Arizona, and Utah have been proposed as critical habitat for the woundfin, an endangered species of fish, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The proposal, published in the November 3, 1977, Federal Register, is intended to ensure the survival and recovery of the species. Interested persons have until January 3, 1978, to comment on the proposed rulemaking.

The woundfin's survival depends upon the maintenance of suitable, undisturbed habitat--shallow riffles and deep pools in moderate to swift currents of silty streams.

One factor which threatens the species is the withdrawal of water from the channel for agricultural or other purposes. Exotic fishes which have been introduced into the system such as bait minnows compete with and crowd out the woundfin. In addition, a Bureau of Reclamation desalinization project near the headwaters of the Virgin River may affect the water quality of the entire river system by altering the mineral and salt content of the water. It is the current chemical makeup of the water which is thought to be a limiting factor in the further spread of introduced fishes which compete with the woundfin.

Once critical habitat is determined no Federal agency could authorize funds or carry out any action that would jeopardize the continued existence of the species or alter its critical habitat. The proposed critical habitat designation would not have any impact on sport fishing in the area.

The woundfin--a silvery, three-inch member of the minnow family--is characterized by the presence of a sharp dorsal spine.

Comments and suggestions concerning this proposal should be sent to the Director (FWS/OES), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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